

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 OPR-02 A-01 SY-05 AID-05

NEAE-00 /087 W

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O P 091358Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6130

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMCONSUL ADANA

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY GENEVA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 11301

GENEVA FOR SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE

SUBJECT: TRIPOLI-ZGHORTA WAR STILL RAGES; NO ARMY INVOLVEMENT YET

REF: BEIRUT 11251

1. THE FIGHTING CONTINUES HOT AND HEAVY IN THE TRIPOLI-ZGHORTA AREA THE FOCUS HAS SHIFTED FROM TRIPOLI CITY TO THE ENVIRONS OF ZGHORTA. A FORCE FROM TRIPOLI IS THREATENING ZGHORTA ON THE GROUND FROM SEVERAL DIRECTIONS. THE EARLIER REPORT OF HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING (REFTEL) IS CONFIRMED. A CONSOLIDATION OF POSITIONS MAY BE OCCURRING, HOWEVER, AND THE FIGHTING REVERTING TO THE TRADITIONAL METHOD OF SHELLING FROM A DISTANCE. TRIPOLI FORCES REPORTEDLY CONTROL AT LEAST ONE VILLAGE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ZGHORTA AND ARE MORTARING THAT CITY'S CENTRAL QUARTERS. CASUALTIES SINCE THE START OF THE TRIPOLI OUTBREAK ARE LISTED AS 30 DEAD AND ABOUT 70 WOUNDED. PROPERTY DAMAGE, ESPECIALLY AMONG CHRISTIAN SHOPS IN TRIPOLI, IS HIGH.

2. THE WARRING SIDES IN THE BATTLE SEEM TO BE MAINLY MOSLEM AND LEFTISTS FROM TRIPOLI, ON ONE SIDE, AND CHRISTIANS FROM ZGHORTA ON THE OTHER. EACH SIDE MAY HAVE TWO OR THREE THOUSAND COMBATANTS. LITTLE OR NO FEDAYEEN INVOLVEMENT IS OCCURRING ON THE MOSLEM SIDE, DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE REFUGEE CAMP NORTH OF TRIPOLI. ALL MAIN FEDAYEEN FACTIONS ARE APPARENTLY TRYING TO KEEP THEIR ORGANIZED FORCES OUT OF THE CONFLICT. THE SAME SEEMS TRUE OF THE PHALANGE ON THE CHRISTIAN SIDE. A PHALANGE LEADER TOLD AN EMBOFF SEPT 9 THAT THE PARTY HAD INSTRUCTED ITS CADRES TO STAY OUT-AND BESIDES, HE ADDED, THE PHALANGE ISN'T STRONG NUMERICALLY IN FRANGIE'S HOME TURF.

3. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT THE CHRISTIAN COMBATANTS, AND PERHAPS THEIR OPPONENTS AS WELL, ARE RUNNING LOW OF MORTAR AMMUNITION. DECISIVE VICTORY FOR EITHER SIDE LOOKS IMPOSSIBLE, AS USUAL. THIS GIVES SOME HOPE THAT THE CONFLICT WILL NOT
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SPREAD AND THAT THE TWO SIDES WILL TIRE. BUT THIS HASN'T HAPPENED YET, AND BEIRUTIS ARE NERVOUS ABOUT PROSPECTS OF THE FIGHT SPREADING TO THE CAPITAL.

4. OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY ARE STILL OUTWARDLY CALM. ZAHLE SEEMS TO HAVE SETTLED DOWN MORE OR LESS DEFINITELY, ALTHOUGH WE ARE ADVISING EMBASSY EMPLOYEES TO AVOID IT BECAUSE OF CONTINUED TENSIONS THERE. IN BEIRUT, A PINBALL

PARLOR IN RAS BEIRUT WAS DYNAMITED DURING THE NIGHT OF SEPT 8-9. THE MOTIVE IS UNKNOWN. THE PARLOR HAPPENED TO BE ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF A BUILDING CONTAINING FOUR APARTMENTS OF EMBASSY AMERICAN EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING THE REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER. BEIRUT'S MAIN PREOCCUPATION AT THE MOMENT IS THE GASOLINE SHORTAGE RESULTING FROM THE FIGHTING IN TRIPOLI, WHERE THE IPC REFINERY IS LOCATED (SEE SEPTTEL).

5. THE CABINET MEETING SEPT 8 (REFTEL) RESULTED IN A POST-PONEMENT OF THE CONTROVERSIAL DECISION ABOUT THE ARMY'S POSSIBLE ROLE. PRES FRANGIE SAID HE COULDN'T ATTEND THE MEETING BECAUSE OF OTHER COMMITMENTS--A STATEMENT REPORTEDLY INFURIATING PRIMIN KARAME--AND A SECOND CABINET MEETING UNDER FRANGIE'S CHAIRMANSHIP IS BEING HELD AT BAABDA TODAY, SEPT 9. CURRENT SPECULATION IS THAT THE ARMY WILL BE CALLED IN, BUT THAT COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ISKANDAR CHANEM WILL RESIGN FIRST TO APPEASE MOSLEM OPINION. CHIEF OF STAFF SAID NASRALLAH, A DRUZE, WILL PRESUMABLY BE ACTING COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF IF THIS OCCURS. WHETHER SUCH A MOVE WOULD STAISFY THE MOSLEMS IS ANYBODY'S GUESS AT THIS STAGE. LEFTIST OPPOSITIONIST KEMAL JUMBLATT HAS ISSUED A SHARP WARNING TO KARAME AGAINST USE OF THE ARMY. MEANWHILE, THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES ARE BY THEIR OWN ADMISSION UNABLE TO STOP THE TRIPOLI WARFARE, AND THE ARMY IS ON ALERT. GODLEY

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